

MACV Army "A" Photo Team Films MEDCAPS

MEDCAPS Medical Civil Affairs Programs were performed by both the U.S. and Vietnamese Military (ARVN). MEDCAPS were conducted by every major military organization up and down the length of Vietnam. By the end of 1967, the 25th Inf Div Yearbook claims, they treated over 140,000 people in their area of responsibility, that was Northwest of Saigon to the Cambodian Border, encompassing War Zone "C".

Most MEDCAPS were simple straight forward. The MEDCAP Team entered the village, usually once a week. The villagers quickly realized the MEDCAP Team wasn't going to steal the cattle, kidnap villagers, nor kill them if their participation in the MEDCAP was restrained. The villagers grasp that the MEDCAP Team was there to help them, not inflict damage. Thus being expected guests, the entire village came out to greet the teams arrival. Tending to the medical needs of the villagers was a doctor, nurse or medic, depending on the security around the village and the availability of these highly trained staff members. Seeking and gaining vital intellegence information on enemy troops movements in the village area being served, alone justified many MEDCAPS.

Lacking electric and phones to get medical aid, the MEDCAPS for most hamlets and villages was the only medical service the people would ever see. Thus it was a very welcome event, when the MEDCAP Team came. The predominate medical problem facing the people was lack of hygiene. The medical staff checked for lice and ticks in the hair. Checked sores and bruises, but mainly through an interpreter to have the people wash themselves. Out of 50 patients seen during a typical MEDCAP, maybe 25 bars of soap were passed out, along with instruction on how to use the soap. Other routine problems included giving out cough medicine, splinting up cracked or broken bones took place. During one MEDCAP, that I filmed crutches were given to one patient. Treating malarial and TB were all part of the MEDCAPS mission in the Vietnamese Countryside.

I recall in the delta region near the town of Tan An, Army "A" Photo Team covered two MEDCAPS. Maybe both at one time. One MEDCAP was conducted by the Vietnamese Military, the other by U.S. Forces. Neither hamlet had electric and neither village had never had a MEDCAP before. Both MEDCAP Teams used audio/visual aids to induce the residents outdoors for the free medical aid.

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The ARVN MEDCAP Team had a Vietnamese movie. Setting up under a large shade tree. The Vietnamese MEDCAP Team set the projector and screen up in the dark shade. Using a small generator to power the projector. In no time the entire village population were engrossed in the strange invention that talked, moved and it was in color. The MEDCAP Team went from person to person asking if they had medical problems. Hence the MEDCAP commenced. What a day for this village, the people got medical aid and saw a movie too,

The U.S. Army took along a television set, with a generator trailer and fold-up antenna. At the village the antenna was extended. The generator started. The T.V. set was switched from AFVN (Armed Forces Vietnam Network) to the Vietnamese Television Network (TVN) I think??? allowing the residents of this hamlet to watch a Vietnamese Soap Opera for the first time in their lives. The children soon flocked around the new found wonder. Many kids ran home to inform the parents. Out of curiosity, the adults started showing up to see what the kids were yelling about. With fear over come the MEDCAP began.

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